

Literature, History and Collective Memory on the Keelung and Tamsui Battles in the Sino-French War of 1884-85

Wen-tang Shiu

ABSTRACT

The Sino-French War of 1884-85 appears to have been forgotten by the French people, despite large quantities of veritable memoirs, archives, documents and researches resulting in an acceptable history of this war that have been done over the past 120 year. These efforts tend to fade away from the collective memory of the French people and are likely to disappear eventually. After all, only the past colonial Indochina has remained their main concern, whereas the Keelung and Tamsui Battles in Taiwan were but just some of the episodes in the nearly forgotten war.

In China, by contrast, there is a bulk of published books, documents and researches concerning the Sino-French War. These accounts include several major historical events which provoked heated debates and are not yet clarified in the related literature. Furthermore, there are inconsistencies in the relevant evaluations. As time passes by, the story/history of the Sino-French War is still clouded in a complete fog of nationalism in China, as described by Hegel: "*People create history, but they don't understand the history created by them.*"

Taiwan was involved in this war of 1884-85 for no good reason but for the gage. The diplomatic failure or the disobedience of the generals, which led to the battles in Taiwan, showed the absurdity of this war. This paper first compares the battles in Keelung and Tamsui by popular pictorial newspapers available at that time in China and France, and further indicates the differences between the historical events and their collective memory/memories. Selected memory, motivational omission, fabrication and/or exaggeration might be one or more of the mechanisms for the distortion in collective memory. They tend to give simplified explanations and to obtain a self-satisfied image by exaggerating or embellishing the historical context.

The research findings on the related literature have been published continuously, but these do not seem to have crucial effect on the people's collective memory of the period, particularly when their emotions and religious beliefs are involved. This

makes clarifications in the historical events very difficult. All in all, objective research must seek truths from facts, and the public shouldn't be misled even by official records and writings.

Keywords: the Sino-French War, Keelung, Tamsui, French-Vietnamese War, *Dian shi zhai pictorial*, collective memory